

JUNE 16, 2004

**SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION MISSTATEMENT OF THE DAY -
SADDAM HUSSEIN - AL QAEDA LINK**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) issued "The Bush Administration Misstatement of the Day" on the link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.

Even though this [claim has been widely refuted](#), President Bush stood firm by his assertion that there was, in fact, a relationship between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda. President Bush said:

"Zarqawi is the best evidence of connection to al Qaeda affiliates and al Qaeda. He's the person who's still killing. He's the person -- and remember the email exchange between al Qaeda leadership and he, himself, about how to disrupt the progress toward freedom?" [Bush Remarks, 6/15/04] Vice President Cheney repeated the same claim. He said: *"In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was in power, overseeing one of the bloodiest regimes of the 20th century. He had long established ties with al Qaeda."* [VP Cheney, Orlando, FL, 6/14/04]

Today, however, CNN reported: The panel investigating the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks found that there was "no credible evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the United States."

9/11 staff: No al Qaeda cooperation with Iraq

WASHINGTON (CNN) - June 16, 2004 - The panel investigating the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks found that there was "no credible evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the United States," according to a staff report issued on Wednesday.

The report says Osama bin Laden "explored possible cooperation with Iraq during his time in Sudan, despite his opposition to (Saddam) Hussein's secular regime. Bin Laden had in fact at one time sponsored anti-Saddam Islamists in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"The Sudanese, to protect their own ties with Iraq, reportedly persuaded bin Laden to cease this support and arranged for contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda."

A senior Iraqi intelligence officer reportedly made three visits to Sudan, finally meeting bin Laden in 1994.

Bin Laden is said to have requested space to establish training camps, as well as assistance in procuring weapons, but Iraq apparently never responded.

"There have been reports that contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda also occurred after bin Laden had returned to Afghanistan, but they do not appear to have resulted in a collaborative relationship," the report said.

"Two senior bin Laden associates associates have adamantly denied" any relationship, the report said.

The report also found that there was no "convincing evidence that any government financially supported al Qaeda before 9/11" other than the limited support provided by the Taliban when bin Laden arrived in Afghanistan.

It found that Saudi Arabia was a rich fund-raising ground for al Qaeda, but that it had found no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior officials within the Saudi government funded al Qaeda.

The commission, which is scheduled to release its final report on the attacks at the end of July, is holding its last hearings Wednesday and Thursday.

Among those testifying at Wednesday's hearing will be a number of CIA officials, who will not be identified in order to protect their anonymity should they be sent on overseas assignments in the future.

Commission chairman Thomas Kean told CNN that the panel would focus on learning more about bin Laden's terrorist network.

"We want to know why these people hate us so much. We're going to follow some of these conspirators from one step to the other as they plan the attack. Then we're going to turn to the response. What did our leaders do? What decisions did they have to make? How did they get planes in the air? How did they do all those things? Mistakes were made on both sides," Kean said.

The panel is expected to discuss reports that al Qaeda had planned to launch the attacks in May or June of 2001, but postponed them because Mohammed Atta and his group were not ready.

"It tells you they're very cautious and careful and an enemy we cannot underestimate. They're entrepreneurial and we've just got to be ready for whatever they have in mind," Kean said.

The panel will also look at the U.S. response to the attacks, which struck the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon. A fourth plane crashed in a Pennsylvania field. Almost 3,000 people died in the attacks.

Last month, the commission met in New York, where it heard testimony about the emergency response to the attacks.

The panel has also questioned President Bush and Vice President Cheney, former President Bill Clinton, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and Attorney General John Ashcroft.}